



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

E-ISSN: 2664-603X
P-ISSN: 2664-6021
Impact Factor (RJIF): 5.92
IJPSG 2026; 8(1): 113-116
www.journalofpoliticalscience.com
Received: 14-11-2025
Accepted: 15-12-2025

Dr. Sonia Shahni
Centre for Political Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi, India

Politics over needs: Women's struggle for political recognition

Sonia Shahni

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2026.v8.i1b.839>

Abstract

The majority of the world countries have implemented policies designed to advance the political representation of women or the minority groups. In Indian context, the reservation policies for women in local government politics are implemented during the 90's. The article tried to argue, how these policies affect the status of women/minority women in society? The piece draws an attention based on the analysis of gender differentiation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and the role of women representatives in local government politics. Does the policies of quota implies the positive impacts to the women representatives in politics? The feminist theories tried to promote the quota system as inclusiveness and the rights of women in a state.

Keywords: Feminist, political representation, recognition in politics, panchayati raj institution

Introduction

The recognition of the rights of every citizen to participate in public decisions is a basic element of democracy which is to be effective requires the needs and interest of all member of the society are respected and represented. The ideas of democracy to the philosophical concept of J.S Mill is "a government of the whole body by the whole people equally represented. The representation of people from all section in decision making bodies is very essential to attain the goal of democracy. An enhancement in the inclusion and influence of the social groups that are under representative or underrepresented would help the society in confronting the problem of structural social inequality and to find remedies for it. In this article I will address the questions of the nature and limits of feminist collaborative politics. Does women experienced in local government politics as an unsuccessful experiment for their identity of political representation? Does needs for women in politics leads to political recognition?

It is necessary to engage with a variety of academic fields, including political science, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, in order to comprehend how women are represented in politics in the modern world. The gender disparity in the fields of politics, economics, education, and health is the primary focus of these fields. Even if the majority of these studies favour a historical comparative approach when analyzing the status of women in various nations within the current paradigm, it is clear that, thorough account of women's rights in particular nations and areas is required in the modern world.

Indirect factors that impact female representation in politics include electoral systems, economic opportunities and participation, educational opportunities, and inherent historical and cultural factors, such as the prevalence of patriarchy-based biases against women. Deficits in these areas are, in fact, the basis for the failure of female empowerment and recognition. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual "Global Gender Gap Report," ^[1] women still do not have the same opportunities as men to demonstrate their abilities, skills, and viewpoints, and despite decades of work, the situation has sadly gotten much worse globally.

Compared to other areas, women's political recognition and empowerment have declined more precipitously. Even though some nations impose gender quotas to guarantee equitable

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Sonia Shahni
Centre for Political Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi, India

^[1] World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2025", Insight Report, June 2025.

representation, the proportion of women in parliaments, leadership roles, and ministerial nominations is steadily declining worldwide. Due to the shortcomings of the systems, relevant individuals and groups have proposed potential solutions to stop this prejudice. As inclusivity has gained popularity in both academics and everyday politics, female participation has emerged as a key issue of conversation. Providing equal representation to various groups in political processes is known as inclusivity. Inclusion of women, young people, and other ethnic and religious communities is referred to here. It is clear, however, that there is an issue with promoting diversity through the inclusion of more women in political processes. The usefulness of gender quotas for women's representation in politics is currently under debate. Does greater representation and acknowledgment result from the growing number of women in politics? Counting the number of women in politics does not necessarily translate into increased female representation, according to recent research and data. There has been a growing attempt in recent years to distinguish between the amount and quality of women in politics, specifically in relation to their influence.

Thus, even if measures that advance gender equality are taken into account, the concept of women's participation and empowerment approach are interrelated to each other. The aim of participatory approach is to give voice to excluded sections which voices are ignored or not heard^[2]. The means for putting them into practice are still insufficient. Currently, it is essential to design programs that will result in a gender balance in politics and to enhance gender equality in policies and practices through well-equipped tactics. It is crucial to involve the constitutional sanction to the decentralised planning at grass root level at India.

The government institutions like gram sabha promotes the women political participation of village community in local level policy making. The issues of women are being articulated by elected representatives belonging to the excluded sections in Panchayati Raj Institutions, and their participation is bound to broaden the agenda of the PRIs by including women oriented issues like, education, drinking water or reproductive health etc. In the long run, such participation will create alternative discourses and power structures.

Feminist and Political Representation

Over the past few years, legal barriers to women's and minorities' political involvement have been removed by democratic governments. However, women, minorities, and minority women continue to be significantly underrepresented in high-level political roles around the globe. Two opposing perspectives on the impact of quotas on minority women are suggested by liberal political theories that support group-based representation. However, by focusing just on one aspect of inequality such as sex or ethnicity quota may exacerbate inequality within a group^[3]. However, women and minorities are significantly underrepresented in politics, any policy that increase their

² Pradeep Narayan, 'Empowerment Through Participation: How Effective is This Approach', *Economic and Political Weekly*, p. 2484, June 21, 2003.

³ Iris Marion Young, 1997, 'Deferring Group Representation', in *Nomos XXXIX: Ethnicity and Group Rights* (eds.) I. Shapiro and W. Kymlicka New York, New York University Press, pp. 205-206.

presence may boost the chance that a more heterogeneous group of women or minorities will be elected^[4]. (Article: Intersectionality Quotas and minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide). Quota policies are generally designed to advanced descriptive representation, where "the numeric similarity between legislative bodies and the electorate they represent in terms of gender race, ethnicity or other demographic characteristics"^[5].

The relationship between descriptive and substantive representation has been criticized by both theoretical and empirical researchers, who contend that female and minority lawmakers are not always better suited to reflect the interests and policy preferences of these groups. However, as more nations enact laws to address the political underrepresentation of marginalized groups, the case for descriptive representation has continued to gain support. In Indian context, established a quota of 33 % of women in its local government. The quota remained confined to the local levels but their extensions to the legislatures was bitterly debated in the 1990s and 2000s. There is still no positive outcomes for the women's representation in legislature. While analyzing the concept of women representation in politics, the idea of gender has been the central theoretical contribution of feminist theorizing in both political science and other discipline. A change in emphasis from sex to gender has two main effects: (1) it shifts the analytical focus from biological sex, which treats men and women as binary opposites, to constructed gender identities, which see masculinity and femininity as characteristics that exist along a continuum, frequently in combination with other identities; and (2) it substitutes careful attention to the effects of men and women as well as masculinities and femininities on political inputs and outcomes for exclusive concern with women in politics and public policy. Focusing on women is still essential for mapping patterns of political access behaviors and impacts because of their continued exclusion from the political realm. With these concepts, the article address the state of research on women and gender in relations to the three facets of political representation: descriptive representation and substantive representation as discussed in the first part of this article.

The Needs for Women in Politics

In order to advance women in politics, it is crucial to examine the idea of needs in the framework of democracy. When something is identified as a need, it should be seen pragmatically as a hypothesis that can be put to the test. In other words, the declaration of need is in the order of a belief that has been requested. When addressing meaning-related issues, the pragmatist suggests that the concept of something is the concept of its logical consequences. It is thought that the concepts of needs are linked to human behavior, which might result in the impoverished class acting in a constructive manner.

Need-based theory has the benefit of justifying democracy by taking a broad look at the issue of political efficacy and authority. The arguments of democracy present a challenge to democracy itself as well as a refutation of classical elitism. The counterargument is that democracy may be seen as the only system of politics that permits a constructive and

⁴ Mansbridge, Jane (1999), 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent women, "Yes", "Journal of Politics" 61(August): 628-56.

⁵ Paxton, Pamela, Sheri Kunovich and Melanie M. Hughes (2007), "Gender in Politics", *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 263-83.

verifiable understanding of human needs, rather than permitting the unrestrained pursuit of the lowest common denominator of demands^[6]. With these ideas, the feminist arise the issues of women participation in institutional politics. Liberal political philosophers, tried to arise the rights of the deprived section of the community, mainly women and minority groups as a community, shifting from the ideas of liberal democracy, which focus on individuality. The needs for quota system in political institution, for the women representation in politics. The quota system introduced in India in 1993, which ensured that women constituted 33 percent of the membership and leadership of village councils i.e, Panchayati Raj Institutions. The voices of the marginalised and the deprived continued to be ignored within the context of economic and social inequalities. The politics of redistribution, enhance the quality of deliberation.

Struggle for Political Recognition

Women have historically been heavily involved in public life due to the high number of women who joined the mass battle for independence from British colonial authority. For around 25% of India's 60-year history, Indira Gandhi served as prime minister. Successful female political leaders, like Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, Indira and Sonia Gandhi in India, and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, are frequently connected to influential male politicians by blood or marriage, just like in other South Asian nations. There aren't many female lawmakers in India, either in the federal parliament or state legislatures, despite the acceptance of women in high political positions. However, the quota for women in institutions of local governance acquires greater significance within the context of women representation in politics. Niraja Gopal Jayal argues for proxy presentation by father, husbands, brothers etc. on a massive scale. On the other hand, over the time it has come to recognized that there are some positive outcomes. Many women gave gradually grown into their roles as elected representatives, recognizing that they should do not what their husbands or father in-laws want them to do, but what their constituents expect them to do.

These positives outcomes are minimal, there are several constraints that women representatives struggle for their political recognition in public space. Some Panchayat women members have been threatened, bullied, or simply marginalized, while others have frequently been removed from office by manipulative gestures of lack of confidence. Without even notifying the woman in charge of the panchayat, meetings are organized, and decisions are made and sent home for the approval of her officials. Dalits and tribal women have been most affected by these issues. (article: Left Behind? Women, Politics, and Development in India).

It is noted that different states and regions have very different effects on how women participate in institutional local governance. The constitutional mandate varies by state; some have given the panchayats more authority, responsibility, and funding than others. As a result, the same formal arrangements work better in some contexts than others, making it more or less challenging for women to

⁶ William J. Meyer (1974), 'Democracy: Needs over Wants', Sage Publication Inc., pp. 197- 214.

participate effectively.

Variations in women's performance in panchayats can also be explained by significant regional, historical, and cultural factors. For example, in areas like the northern states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, where caste and patriarchal structures are more deeply ingrained, there are more barriers to women's effective participation; on the other hand, in areas where women's customary status is somewhat higher due to a nineteenth-century social reform movement, such as Maharashtra, where women have been relatively more successful.

Conclusion

The panchayat quota system was implemented to make up for women's historically and culturally limited exclusion from public politics. Fraser contends that just increasing the number of women in politics would not be sufficient to solve the exclusion of presence and voice. Instead, resources would need to be redistributed. Social and gender inequities persists to determined the quality of its deliberation and the outcomes of its decisions. Neither political parties nor governments have raised the number of seats for women to parity, nor have quotas for women changed the status of women in the home. Women are sharing their rights as working within the home and laborers in many cases and then as panchas. However, the level of self-confidence and aspiration expressed by women who have been participated in Panchayati Raj Institutions politics are on increase. Their representation, make a space for recognition at one point. The increase in the context of a patriarchal society where quotas were initially seen as undermining the merit based representation within institutions.

There are valid reasons to think that the state is heavily impacted by the cultural norms and beliefs of the majority, even if it is not controlled by them. This has an effect on public policies, administrative practices, bureaucratic organizations, and experience. In fact, opportunities for minorities to be adequately accommodated cannot only be offered procedurally in situations where they are politically invisible or underrepresented. They need possibilities, political spaces, and material and symbolic resources that allow the prerequisites for a just downstream state-driven acknowledgment.

References

1. Cleaver F. Institution agency and the limitation of participatory approaches to development. In: Cook B, Kothari U, editors. *Participation: the new tyranny*. London: Zed Books; 2001. p. 36-55.
2. Hasan Z, Menon R. *Unequal citizens: a study of Muslim women in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; 2004.
3. Hughes MM. Intersectionality, quotas and minority women's political representation worldwide. *American Political Science Review*. 2011;105(3):604-620.
4. Young IM. Deferring group representation. In: Shapiro I, Kymlicka W, editors. *Nomos XXXIX: ethnicity and group rights*. New York: New York University Press; 1997. p. 349-376.
5. Jayal NG. *Democracy and the state: welfare, secularism and development in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; 1999.
6. Jayal NG. *Left behind? Women, politics, and*

development in India. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*. 2008;14(2):91-102.

- 7. Kohli A. *State-directed development: political power and industrialization in the global periphery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004.
- 8. Kymlicka W. *Multicultural citizenship: a liberal theory of minority rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1995.
- 9. Mansbridge J. Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent “yes”. *Journal of Politics*. 1999;61(3):628-656.
- 10. Paxton P, Kunovich S, Hughes MM. Gender in politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 2007;33:263-283.
- 11. Pitkin HF. *The concept of representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1972.
- 12. Narayan P. Empowerment through participation: how effective is this approach? *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2003;38(24):2484-2486.
- 13. Meyer WJ. *Democracy: needs over wants*. Sage Publications. 1974;2(2):197-214.
- 14. Williams R. *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. London: Fontana Press; 1976.
- 15. World Economic Forum. *Global gender gap report 2025. Insight report*. Geneva: World Economic Forum; 2025.